



# TRUE NORTH





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# A GOLFERS DREAM GETAWAY

*Known for its great golf, impeccable service and exclusivity for members, True North Golf Club stands alone in the regional and national marketplace. Named Best Golf Course by Michigan Digest, True North combines the personal care of an exclusive resort with a golf getaway like no other.*

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Nestled in the forest above Harbor Springs, Michigan, True North Golf Club is a golf enthusiasts dream. Just five miles from the shore of Little Traverse Bay, True North offers 18 challenging and imaginative holes carved from Michigan's legendary north woods. Designed by award-winning architect Jim Engh, True North captures the true essence of what golf is all about: beautiful landscapes and an elegant atmosphere that is unforgettable.





Exclusive and private, True North is not your typical golf club. There are no tee-times and it's not open to the public. Catering to a regional and national membership and their guests, True North's focus on low-volume, high level of service creates an experience that's truly one-of-a-kind. Part of developing that unique experience is looking at the past and developing a strategy that's worked for them. For General Manager Matt Payne, the wait was well worth it.

“The club has gone through a few different business models since it first began opera-

tion in 2005 as a private club,” Payne said. “It switched to a semi-private resort club and now it's back to a private golf club.”

Making the move from public-to-private and bucking the trend used by other golf clubs who open their doors to accommodate a wider customer base, True North's unique approach has afforded the golf club an opportunity to expand its offering beyond just the golf course – an experience that truly encapsulates what it means when someone says ‘you have to see it for yourself’.



## NATIONAL NOTORIETY

The difference begins early and can be seen consistently throughout both the course and clubhouse. Located in a self contained environment, True North also owns 5 four-bedroom cottages that are available for rent by members and their guests; an amenity that creates a stay-and-play type atmosphere. An offering that has increased True North's national notoriety.

"This was a way for the Club to attract a national database of members," Payne said. "We have quite a few members who live across North America, including Texas, Cal-

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ifornia, Canada, New York, etc. and come to True North to get away from the hassles of everyday life and experience the exclusivity and excellence True North provides. Now they don't have to stay off property or rent a house, they can just call the club's concierge, know that everything will be ready for when they arrive and will be a golf cart away from the first tee, dining or any of the other amenities at True North. It's just made the marketing and the marketability of the club that much easier at a national level."

Currently at 70 members, True North hopes

to double that mark to 140 while ensuring that the private experience that the club is known for remains intact. From an outside perspective, membership criteria to private clubs can seem excessive or downright complicated. While True North is private, the prerequisites are simple.

"They need to enjoy golf at a high level," Payne said. "They need to enjoy the low-volume, get-away-from-it-all type experience and they need to be someone who will respect the other members, guests, staff and the environment we are delivering at True



North. We're kind of casual in the fact that I'm not looking for any specific type of demographic – just someone that's going to enjoy what we offer and that will respect everything that comes with it.”

## FOCUSED ON PRIVATE EXPERIENCE

The quaint, lakeside setting of Harbor Springs, Michigan lends itself, naturally, to competition in the form of publically-accessible golf clubs and resort clubs. With people coming from all over the state and North America to enjoy the natural landscape, True

North remains focused on the private club experience and allowing limited opportunities for non-members to enjoy what the Club has to offer.

“By only having a handful of people out on the golf course at any one time, it creates a different type of golfing experience than when you're backed up by other foursomes,” Payne said. “We're really trying to promote and provide an exclusive private club experience that separates ourselves from other clubs in the area.” The low-volume nature of True North not only makes it an appeal-





ing destination for prospective members, but also for the employees, who benefit from a seamless approach to the Club and its overarching commitment to exceptional service.

“We have an opportunity to make a difference at every level and every level of job category throughout the club,” Payne said. “There’s a little bit more time to have that personal connection with the members and their guests and to ensure that what we’re doing meets their standards to make a difference in their day.”

## ARCHITECTURAL MARVEL

True North was named #7 in Michigan on Golf Digest’s list for Best In State, recognition that Payne believes stretches beyond just the beauty of the course.

“This ranking is architecturally based on the golf course and it validates the quality of our course. But to our members and guests the full experience is what truly differentiates us,” he said. “The quality of the golf course, our caddies, the northern woods setting that they’re in, the lodging they stayed in, and the meals they enjoyed all factor in. The ranking











of our course and the feedback we receive from our members and guests validate the work that we're all doing. It gives our team pride, separates us from the competition, and shows that we know what we're doing, we're focused on delivering and to keep it going."

Serving such a specific, yet diverse clientele involves harnessing and forging quality relationships with reliable suppliers. True North's multi-faceted ties offer a unique perspective on the importance of flexibility within a business.

"With our low volume, there may only be a

handful of people who come on our property in one day," Payne said. "So the freshness of our food and the availability of our wines – it's all about flexibility. Creating relationships with suppliers and having them understand your business, your needs and your pitfalls. Having them work with you makes all the difference in the world. Having those relationships is huge."

"On the grounds side, we work with Toro Equipment. They've been incredibly flexible with us as far as financing and providing us with demo units," Payne said. "It's an ever-evolving industry out there when it comes to golf course maintenance, and if you're



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not constantly looking to upgrade and stay on the cutting-edge than you're just chasing your tail."

## COHESIVE CONNECTION

Golf clubs are everywhere. The competition is not just regional or national – it's global. With a myriad of leisure activities competing for peoples' time and money, the private and personal club experience at True North, from a marketing perspective, focuses on a cohesive connection that creates exposure for not just the Club, but also Harbor Springs.

"Once I get people on property to experience the Club, than it sells itself," Payne said. "There's a lot of great golf clubs out there in the world, but there is only one Harbor Springs, so I need to leverage Harbor Springs and what Harbor Springs brings to the area.

We're just a part of the bigger piece with the area."

Continuing to build connections and amplify the beauty of both the Club and the area are long-term goals that Payne won't lose sight of. Memberships matter, but the foundation for the future and success is all about making a golfers dream getaway, a reality.

"The private golf club industry is a tough business. The world has changed since 2008. It's just that a lot of people don't know about True North Golf Club. A lot of people don't know about Harbor Springs and northern Michigan when you look at a map of the United States and how beautiful it is up here and how the summer up here is just so perfect."





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